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ABSTRACT

This report focuses on current trends of women in the workforce, issues they face with child care, and how the implications of those trends and issues have influenced corporate and governmental response. In 1990, 47% of the working mother population relied on spouses or relatives to provide care for their young children. Between 2 and 5 million children ages 6 to 13 are on their own between the time school lets out and when their parents return from work. Licensed day care centers account for the care of approximately 10% of the 8.5 million children under six years of age. For families earning \$15,000 or less annually with a child under 5 years of age, childcare expenses consume 23% of all household expenditures. For families earning over \$50,000 the percentage falls to 6%. Even in states where overall supply of child care is high, access is sharply lower in poorer areas and rural communities. The high cost of child care restricts women's employment prospects, both in terms of current employment status and the amount of time they spend in paid work. The professional part-time workforce, job sharing, shift work, flexible work hours, corporate responses, and federal programs as they relate to employed parents are discussed. (JBJ)

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Trends, Issues, and Implications:  
The Influence of Child Care Needs on the Employment of Women

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Presented at the Mid-South Educational  
Research Association  
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The struggle for women to balance job and family highlights changing trends in our society and wrests creative responses from individuals, corporations and government. The word "struggle" is appropriate because the changes in work roles and family relationships has caused both individual and social turmoil. These changes stem from current economic and political realities, redefinition of individual values and new social expectations. Change is slow and arduous. Committed energy and creativity is required to balance these two ways by which a majority of women define themselves: through their jobs and their families. This report focuses on current trends of women in the workforce, issues they face with child care, and how the implications of those trends and issues have influenced corporate and governmental response.

A statistical overview of women in the workforce provides insight into the powerful impact of recent trends and their implications for the demand in child care. Almost 90% of women in the United States become mothers at some point in their lives

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(Bingham and Stryker, 1987). A total of over 57 million women, or approximately 74% of all women aged 20 to 44 years of age, are currently in the workforce (Bolles, 1994). Of those women who work outside the home, 71% hold full-time jobs (Bingham and Stryker, p. 31).

A significant difference can be seen in the female labor force between those women with children and those without. In 1992, 84% of women 20 to 54 years of age with no children under 18 worked outside the home. The figures for the same group of women drops, however, to 54% for 50 weeks, full time employment (Hayghe & Bianchi, 1994). The 1992 figures show that 72.9% of married mothers worked outside the home in either full or part-time capacity. Thirty-six percent of those mothers worked full time (fifty to fifty-two weeks) (p. 25). The number of married working women with children under six years of age increased by 52% between 1972 and 1982. Currently 58% of the total female labor force (both full and part-time) are women with children under the age of six (Hofferth & Deich, 1994). However, married mother's work patterns differ by the needs of their children. While 78% of married mothers whose youngest child was school age (6 to 17 years old) worked at some time in 1992, only 67%, or fewer of the mothers worked if their youngest child was under 6 years of age (Hayghe & Bianchi, p. 25).

The age of the children influence the percentages of women working full time vs. part-time as well. Only 43% of the married mothers whose youngest child was of school age worked year round full time. Compare this figure as it drops to 31% of full time

working mothers with children under 6 years of age (p. 25). Young children significantly reduce the annual work experience of married mothers.

Never married mothers constitute the smallest proportion of working mothers (only 53% in 1986) (Zimmerman, 1992). Their unemployment rate was almost 5 times higher than married mothers. Never married mothers also tend to be younger than married mothers, 43% being younger than age 25. Over twice as many were high school dropouts as mothers who were married, 36% and 16% respectively, with only 5% of the never married mothers holding college degrees (p.424).

To complete the picture of the magnitude and ramifications of mothers in the workforce, one must include statistics on the growing number of single women supporting a family. The number of divorced, widowed or separated working women with children under 18 years of age increased 74% between 1971 and 1982. In 1992 Ninety percent (90%) of all single parents are women (Bingham & Stryker, p. 30). Nearly 75% of employed women who maintained families with children under 18 worked full time (Women's Bureau, 1993). In 1992, 12 million families were maintained by women in the United States. This figure has more than doubled since 1970. These 12 million families represent 17.6% of total U.S. families (Women's Bureau, p. 5). Families maintained by women had the lowest median income of all family types in 1991 (Women's Bureau, p. 6). The total number of families maintained by women below the poverty level increased from 3.0 million in 1980 to 4.2 million in 1991. About one-third of all families maintained by a woman have

incomes below the poverty line (Norwood, 1982). These depressing figures point to a pervasive trend that women who maintain families, especially those with children under age 18, have more serious socioeconomic problems than other women in the population.

The gains in the proportion of mothers with year-round full-time work experience is dramatic. These trends reflect many broad-based changes in American society. Culturally it has become increasingly acceptable, perhaps even expected, for mothers to be breadwinners as well as caregivers. Economic necessity, obvious for women heads of households, but increasingly for dual-earning families as well, continues to be a driving force for female labor force participation. Women are marrying later, and giving birth to fewer children later in their lives. They are developing strong ties to the labor market before their childbearing years that withstand the pressures of marriage and child rearing (Hayghe & Bianchi, p. 27).

The figures stated in the above paragraphs conclusively demonstrate that many children live in homes where the mother works either full or part-time, most or all of the year. Given these data, what are the implications for child care? In 1965, 62% of working mothers relied on spouses or relatives to care for young children (Fuller & Liang, 1993). By 1990, only 47% of the working mother population relied on the traditional spouse or relative, although it is still the preferred method (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1992). Between 2 and 5 million children between the ages of 6 and 13 are on their own between the time school lets out and when their

parents return from work. These children are the latch key kids. (Bingham & Stryker, p. 32).

The 80,000 licensed day care or preschool center (defined as child care of children 5 years of age and below) in the United States account for the care of approximately 10% of the 8.5 million children under six years of age. Day care centers are expensive and can be unreliable for the mother with lower income and shifting or odd work hours. Private day care centers charge from \$80 to \$200 per week while family day care homes charge \$40 to \$70 per week (Bingham & Stryker, p.32). For families earning \$15,000 or less annually and with a child under 5 years of age, child care expenses consume 23% of all household expenditures. For those families earning over \$50,000, the percentage falls dramatically to 6% of the total household expenditures (p. 32).

Researchers Fuller and Liang (1993) studied 100 child care centers in 36 states in an attempt to answer two questions: 1) was the expanding availability of child care spaces benefiting all types of families and communities equally, and 2) where it lags behind, what are the forces creating the drag?

The results show marked inequalities in regards to availability and benefits. Supply of and access to licensed child care facilities varies significantly between rich and poor counties. Among the 25% most affluent counties, a pre school class group is available for every 45 children ages 3-5. Lowest quartile counties offer one class for every 77 children (p. i). Regional disparities appear as well. Two times the number of preschools are available in the northeastern United States for working class and poor families

relative to those families in the south. Even in states where overall supply of child care is high, access is sharply lower in poorer areas and rural communities (p. i).

A recent study of child care availability in rural Louisiana (Keefer, 1995) showed limited access to licensed child care. By parish (county), the researcher tabulated the percentage of women of child-bearing age in the workforce, number of children under 12 and the number of licensed child care facilities. Results indicated that in rural parishes there are approximately 7 children needing child care for every available slot. If the slots provided by Head Start are removed from the equation--excluded because only some families are eligible for their services--the child per slot ratio rises to an average of 12.7 children for every space available.

Twenty percent of the unemployed women in the rural Louisiana study indicated that they were kept from working due to lack of available child care, while over 19% of these women cited the same reason for their inability to attend school (p. 70).

Interestingly enough, the availability of child care facilities is often driven by two segments of the population at opposite ends of the socioeconomic spectrum. The "yuppie effect" is the result of those areas with large populations of parents earning higher wages benefiting from the most abundant supply of preschools. These people demand quality child care and are willing to pay more to ensure their children's well being. Urban centers, possessing a relatively large share of families below the poverty line, attract more child care subsidies. These subsidies raise the supply of preschools in poor, inner-city neighborhoods (p.iii).

Although poverty rates are even higher in rural counties of the South and Midwest, these communities have neither the "yuppie effect" or government subsidies to offset the dearth of supply in child care facilities.

Their study also indicates changes in the American family structure shape the disparities in demand for and supply of child care. Counties with relatively low numbers of child care facilities per capita are more heavily populated by traditional families, (i.e., families characterized by having both mother and father in the home, the father being the primary bread-winner), lower rates of female employment, religious ties, and relatives living in proximity (p.iii).

In communities with a high divorce rate, the researchers found lower quality child care centers (one criterion being ratio of children to teachers). Parents residing in counties with higher school attainment levels expressed the strongest demand for pre-school and formal child care (p. iii).

Fuller and Liang concluded that parents do not have equal access to child care facilities throughout the United States. They point to three factors to help explain local inequalities. First to influence the availability of preschools is the local patterns of wealth, poverty and maternal employment of a given region. They also cite the predominant structure of the families within a local area and whether they are wealthy or impoverished, urban or rural. Finally they note that the presence or not of government subsidies contributes to the number of licensed child care centers (p. iv).

The high cost of child care restrict women's employment prospects, both in terms of current employment status and the

amount of time they spend in paid work (Brayfield, 1992). In a study of 2,241 mothers with a child under age 5 and 1,739 mothers with a child aged 5-12 years, Brayfield found that women's perception about the price of child care in relation to salary is a strong determinant as to whether or not she enters the labor market. The opportunity cost of staying home with one's children is greater for women who can earn more. The presence of other adults in the household and availability of relatives to help in child care encouraged women's employment (p. 87).

A recent Wall Street Journal article (Shellenbarger, Oct. 19, 1994) on work and family speaks of one of parents' most painful dilemma's: a change in work hours and the inability to find adequate child care. In her report Shellenbarger documents that "court dockets nationwide bear evidence of a trend: More workers are getting disciplined or fired because they can't find child care" (B1). The author poses the question that after two decades of huge growth in both the number of working parents and day care facilities, why are employees still being forced to choose between their children and their jobs? Her answer is that the rules of the workplace are changing and that the child-care system is not keeping up. With weekend and night work, forced overtime and involuntary part-time work with unpredictable hours--the techniques used by many employers to cut costs and improve service--workers are increasingly losing control over their work hours. Most child-care providers refuse to alter the 9-to-5 schedule.

Shellenbarger states that it is a no-win situation for both employers and employees. Employers can't win when an employee

lacks adequate child care to comply with the schedule change and therefore incurs costs of lost workers and higher payroll taxes. Many employees face child-care arrangements so fragile that they collapse at the slightest schedule change. Frequently women are disproportionately affected by inflexible child-care arrangements in that their lower paying jobs offer them fewer options in child care.

The issue is clear: the demand for accessible, affordable, high-quality child care is high. Individuals, business and government have responded to this high need in a variety of ways.

Individuals have increasingly opted for the professional part-time workforce. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the professional part-time workforce increased 50% between 1972 and 1982 (Bingham & Stryker, p. 80). These are people in managerial and professional specialty occupations with salaries sufficiently large for a family to survive on some fraction of the typical annual salary for that profession. The majority (71%) of these part-time professionals are women. These professionals frequently look for others with similar interests and form partnerships with all sharing flexible hours. All of these professional occupations require high level of education, something that women have to plan for early on in their career development (p. 81).

Another approach adopted by individuals creatively attempting to manage work and family, again opts for part-time schedules. Shellenbarger (Dec. 7, 1994) speaks of job sharing. Although growth in job sharing policies has stymied, the option still exists. Currently the job sharers are known more as a "hardy and entrepreneurial team," (B1) frequently going for job interviews

together and selling themselves as two for the price of one. Shellenbarger describes the best job sharers as self-managed work teams in microcosm, resolving any conflicts on their own. The company profits because the team does incorporate the skills and talents of two for slightly more than the cost of one. "Job sharing is the concept that fits best with the current changes in the work force, allowing employees to master larger-than-life workloads without crashing" (B1).

Shift work is commonly used in dual-earner families to offset the child-care problem. In 1983, approximately one third of dual-earner couples with children included at least one spouse who worked hours outside of the standard 8-to-5 schedule (Zedeck & Mosier, 1990). Although this response allows both parents more involvement in the family and eases the costs of child care, increased family stress and decreased family satisfaction are also cited as potential drawbacks (p. 244).

Society's shift towards values that favor work models encouraging parents to succeed with both work and family has pressured the corporate world for a response. Those responses come in a variety of ways with varied success. In most cases, benefits that would help parents manage work and family responsibilities are offered at the discretion of employers. Some of these options are flexible spending accounts, cafeteria benefit plans, vouchers, information and referral services, unpaid leave, work at home, part-time work, flextime and on-site child care (Hofferth & Deich, 1994).

The most expensive option and the one that requires the most commitment is that of the on-site day care (p. 244). Parents are able

to use the child care regardless of working hours, quality is guaranteed by the company and children are close to their parents. On-site day care has been documented to increase satisfaction and commitment and reduce turnover (p. 245). Corporate-sponsored daycare is not without its problems. Providing child care to employees is expensive to implement and maintain successfully. Sometimes, the parent's preference for other options creates unstable usage rates. Other times, the space available is not sufficient for the number of children in need. Companies may not have child care centers at all sites. The trend is to provide for children of upper level positions while factory workers do not enjoy the same benefits. Some childless employees may view the child-care center as an inequitable benefit, especially if the cost of the care is subsidized (p. 245).

Employers have several creative options for help in payment for child care. These are the flexible spending accounts, cafeteria benefit plans and vouchers. These plans offer employees options in their benefits that include child care provisions.

The cafeteria plan is superior to a conventional benefits plan in many ways. It gives the employer the ability to control the costs of benefits, because increases in the costs of benefits are often borne by the employee, and to be responsive to employees' desires by giving them more choices and tax benefits. It also enables the organization to offer the relatively expensive benefit of child care, which only some employees need, without

raising concerns of inequity or taking benefit dollars away from other employees (p. 245).

One of the least costly and probably most cost-effective option for the corporation is providing information and referral services that offer parents help in finding dependable care. In addition to the traditional concept of aiding parents with information and referrals, information is sometimes delivered during brown bag lunches or seminars on parenting.

Flexible work hours help employees deal with excessive work hours or work schedules that conflict with child care arrangements (p. 246). In some programs the employee may vary starting times daily or "bank" hours during the workday to carry over into subsequent days. Cost to the organization is little, and the advantages appear to be increased productivity, less absenteeism and tardiness. Employee morale rises due to increased job satisfaction and the perception that one can control his/her time.

Drawbacks to flextime exist. Many jobs cannot incorporate flextime and those that only allow 1 to 2 hours of flexible hours are of little benefit. Flextime doesn't help women alleviate the demands of home, however it does offer assistance in juggling the responsibilities. Managers have to be committed to the increased planning and time-keeping and the added expense of building use costs additional hours.

The options of permanent part-time work and job sharing mentioned earlier requires the cooperation of employers. Among the

many advantages to the employer is the ability to cover peak periods, resolve scheduling problems and count on higher productivity and lower absenteeism.

The benefits to women of permanent part-time work and job sharing must be weighed with its drawbacks. Part-time employment still has somewhat of a negative image. Most high-level positions require full-time commitment and the upward mobility of part-time workers might be limited. These images of the part-time employee as less committed to work would reinforce the glass ceiling for women.

Finally, some employers are offering "flexiplace" employment that allows one to do job-related work at a site away from the office and then electronically transfer the results to the office or to another location (Cross & Raizman, 1986). As with other options, the advantages and disadvantages must be weighed. Flexiplace does give more flexible work hours, greater autonomy and potential savings in work-related costs such as food, clothing and transportation. Employees can stay home with sick children or alleviate the need for child care altogether. Employees can work while on maternity or paternity leave, stay current on their job, and remain home longer with their children (Bureau of National Affairs, 1986).

However, "for those people who have primary child-care responsibilities, typically female clerical workers with few other work options, work at home introduces stress because they constantly are forced to deal with simultaneous demands of conflicting work and family roles" (Olson & Primps, 1984).

Exploitation is an issue with telecommuting. Concern stems

due to the population most likely to be vulnerable; handicapped and elderly persons and women who are forced to work at home because of child care responsibilities. Again, questions of promotion are relevant given that the person who works by telecommuting is not visible to the company. Telecommuting does, however, enable people to work who would not otherwise be able to stay in the market.

Recent studies are encouraging concerning employee commitment to those companies who have worked to implement programs that benefit family life. Work Family Directions, a consulting firm specializing in changes in the labor force, reports that "the people who value and use the work/life supports and policies (flex-time, job-sharing, and family leave) are actually the most committed people in the company" (Morning Edition, National Public Radio, Nov. 2 1995).

Citing various studies Ellen Galinsky, Co-President of Families and Work Institute of New York City stated that "In the beginning of these programs, (work/life programs) people thought if you give employees an inch they will take a mile...What we found is just the opposite, that if people are given an inch they seem to give back a mile." (Morning Edition, NPR, Nov. 2, 1995) Following a study at Johnson and Johnson, Families and Work Institute discovered that people who had access to and used time flexibility missed half as much work as people who didn't. However, continues Galinsky, two other components are crucial in helping to make the instituted programs effective. Important is a supervisor who deals with the employee in a constructive way in the day-in and day-out issues. The second important component is that the company culture

"doesn't punish you for having a life and a job." (Morning Edition, NPR, Nov. 2, 1995).

These options show various corporate attempts to enable employees to balance work and family. There remains the role of the United States government. How has government policy responded to the emergence of family concerns as they relate to the workforce, specifically the female workforce?

In the late 1980s, federal executive and legislative attention in the U. S. focused unprecedented attention on early education and child care. Even though the United States early in its development provided public education, publicly funded kindergarten emerged only in the last two decades. With the new national goal of "school readiness," the government will take an increasingly larger role in the education of young children (Hofferth & Deich, 1994 ).

The United States, unlike many European nations, has never specifically encouraged female employment through federal policies. Prior to the 1980s the major provision for assisting families with the costs of rearing children was the individual exemption in the federal income tax code (p. 431). However, with the increasing maternal employment in the 1970s, the proportion of parents claiming the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit deduction on their personal income tax rose dramatically (p. 425). This deduction for child care expenditures was the single largest instrument of child care policy prior to the passage of the 1990 child care legislation. Currently, the use of this credit has declined somewhat due to changes in government requirements.

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) was introduced in the mid 70s. Households with incomes falling below a certain level (approximately 20,000 annually), having at least one dependent child and one employed person in the home, were eligible for the EITC. The value of the EITC constitutes between one-fifth and one-quarter of the family income ( p.430).

Head Start is a federally funded educational program that acts as a family support program by providing social services to many low-income children and their families. These programs are not designed to provide child care to working mothers in that they typically operate part-day for part of the year. Currently policy makers are attempting to decide if the increasing funds authorized under Title I will be used to serve more children or offer more services (p. 431).

One of the first legislative acts specifically designed to help maternal employment passed in 1990. The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) provided \$750 million in annual funding to states to provide child care services to eligible children (under age 13, low-income family, and have employed parents or parents who are in training or education). Also included were stipulations to improve the availability and quality of care (U. S. Congress, 1990). The "At-Risk" Child Care Program gives states additional funding to provide child care assistance to "low-income, non-AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children). These are families that the state determines is the only way to enable employment of the parent(s) or would otherwise be at-risk of becoming dependent upon AFDC.

In 1993 the Family and Medical Leave Act, mandated that employers with 50 or more employees grant unpaid but job-protected parental leave of 12 weeks to care for a newborn or ill child. This was unprecedented in the United States although many European countries with a comparable female (or higher) workforce have offered parental leaves for years (p. 445). Also, the leave is received with mixed reviews as many women feel employers would be less likely to hire them for fear that they would be more likely than men to take advantage of the new legislation .

The new U.S. child care legislation of the 90s do provide for family support to individuals through income benefits as well as providing new funds for the supply and quality improvements in child care. However, it does not solve the problem of infant care, the group of children that the market does not adequately supply child care. Given that in 1990 there were about 18.6 million preschool children ages 0-4 in the United States, and 9.3 million of them had employed mothers, the one half of 1% that the federal budget spends on child care and preschool programs lags far behind in commitment to help families balance work and home.

In light of the individual, corporate and federal response, where does that leave the employed woman? Comments make by June Ellenoff O'Neill in a Wall Street Journal Article highlight the crucial role child care plays in women's employment. She documents the slow shrinking of the pay gap between men and women, even in light of the feminist movement of the 60s, 70s and 80s. She attributes this gap to several factors, discrimination being only one. She contends that although basic skills are acquired in school, it is

in the labor market where specialized skills are developed that bring higher wages. It is in this labor market that women's continuous work experience falls far below men of comparable education and skill. Only recently, "with delayed marriage, low fertility, and an increasing tendency for mothers of young children to work, women have acquired many more years of continuous work experience than was true in the past" (A10). This has strong implications for the options of professional part-time work for women and the expectations of an adequate standard of living.

Also, the increase in women's college and graduate attainment has contributed to the shrinking of the gap. Many of the college years and especially those years required for graduate school fall into the years that the majority of women begin their families.

The gap remains. Currently hourly wages are 74% of the earning of men. At ages 25 to 34, where women's skills have increased the most, the gap narrows to 87%. However, look at the following revealing figures of the comparable levels of pay: among people 27 to 33 who have never had children, the earnings of women are close to 98%.

She concludes that it is not discrimination but rather "women's decisions ...rooted in real economic forces affecting the family, particularly gender differences in the priority placed on market work vs. child-care responsibilities...Technology has reduced the burden of housework, but child care remains a responsibility that is harder to shift to the market" (A10).

This paper has documented trends in women's employment and the individual, corporate and government responses that these

trends elicited. The facts present us with the conclusion that the feminization of poverty will not abate nor will employed women successfully balance the demands of work and home until fundamental support structures for child care are in place.

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